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**Explaining the puzzling stagnation of apprenticeships
in Germany's security services: A case of insufficient institutional work?**

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Abstract

In this paper, we study the puzzling case of apprenticeship training in Germany's security services industry: there is a growing consensus across stakeholder groups that apprenticeship as a formal training model, targeted to create a vocation or *Beruf* rather than a profession, can help the industry to overcome skill deficiencies and reputational issues; however, the number of apprentices in this field has remained low and stagnant over the past decade or so. How can we explain this limited institutionalization despite significant attempts toward institutional work for the purpose of creating an apprenticeship program? Based on rich qualitative case material, we argue that limited institutionalization can be explained by insufficient institutional work: while the actors have engaged with the cognitive and normative dimension of institutions of workforce training, they have failed to establish sufficient regulative support, such as (re-)creating the strong link between formal training and occupational status, including pay and benefits. Our study contributes to the literature by arguing that institutional work needs to target all three 'pillars' in conjunction, and that it needs to be aligned with the particular coordination logic in a given institutional configuration, such as Germany as a Coordinated Market Economy (CME)—failure to do so results in incomplete and inconsistent institutional work. We add to research on institutional work, not least in the realm of occupations and professions, by theorizing the stagnation of an institutional work project as the result of both incomplete and inconsistent, hence insufficient, institutional work.

Keywords: institutional work, limited institutionalization, insufficient institutional work, varieties of capitalism, apprenticeships, occupations.

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the creation of an apprenticeship training program for protection and security services (*Fachkraft fuer Schutz und Sicherheit*) in Germany to explore processes of professional or, in our case setting, vocational projects (see Muzio, Brock, & Suddaby, 2013; Suddaby & Viale, 2011). We identify an intriguing puzzle: while a broad set of collective actors, including employers and labor unions, engaged in considerable institutional work to create this newly developed training program as early as 2002, the number of apprentices has remained stagnant and at a low level since then. As a result, even today, less than 3 per cent of the workforce in the security and protection services industry has completed a formal apprenticeship program. In consequence, meaningful social status, occupational closure, and improved prospects for career development and pay progression are very limited. This observation is surprising because previous research suggests that apprenticeship programs are very common in Germany, even in challenging industry environments (Clarke, Winch, & Brockmann, 2013).

Leveraging this research setting involving the creation but limited institutionalization of an apprenticeship program, our study aims to extend our understanding of why institutional work projects, such as those related to professional or vocational projects, may fail. Our study is one of the few empirical explorations of unsuccessful institutional work projects, aiming to ‘create, maintain, or disrupt’ institutions (see Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 215), and we thus extend existing research which has mostly looked at successful cases of institutional entrepreneurship and work (e.g., Fortwengel & Jackson, 2016; McGaughey, 2013). More specifically, we address the following research question: *How can we explain the limited and stagnating institutionalization of a new training practice over the course of a professional or vocational project?*

Our findings reveal that while collective actors engaged in institutional work by adopting activities toward cognitive, normative, and regulative work (see Scott, 2008), we make the important observation that their institutional work has been insufficient because they have failed to reproduce critical regulatory support, involving rules and regulations that prescribe important components such as pay as well as career progression, and thus occupational status. Based on our rich qualitative case material, we theorize that, in order to be successful, institutional work needs to target all three ‘pillars’ of an institutional environment (Scott, 2008) in conjunction, and that it may have to reproduce the overarching logic of a particular type of capitalist coordination (Hall & Soskice, 2001). As a corollary, if institutional work is incomplete and inconsistent, it will be insufficient, resulting in the stagnation of a new practice—and low institutionalization.

With this argument, our paper contributes to institutional theory in general, and the concept of institutional work in particular, in three ways. First, we illustrate on the basis of our case material how institutional work is motivated by existing templates, norms, and rules, which help embed an emerging phenomenon into existing institutional structures. As such, institutional work is deeply informed by pre-existing cognitions, norms and values as well as regulations, suggesting a more nuanced view on agency in institutional theory. Second, we show exactly how different actor groups have engaged in institutional work in order to create the new vocation for security and protection services, and in the process exerted considerable agency for the purpose of creating a new apprenticeship training program. Here, building on previous work that engaged with Scott’s (2008) concept of the institutional environment as involving three interrelated ‘pillars’ (e.g., Fortwengel & Jackson, 2016; Muzio & Faulconbridge, 2013), we identify three clusters of practices: cognitive, normative, and regulative work. Third, our paper provides rich case material on how and why the newly created

vocation has not been widely adopted, suggesting limited institutionalization of the new training practice and, ultimately, limited success of institutional work. Here, we make the important observation that institutional work in our case setting focused on the cognitive and normative pillars (Scott, 2008) of the institutional environment, whereas regulative work aiming at creating facilitating rules and regulations was less successful. Notably, neglecting to formally link the vocation with accompanying benefits in pay and status over the course of (limited) regulative work makes it unattractive to invest in industry-specific knowledge and skills. We thus make the paradoxical observation that while a broad set of actors were in favor of supporting the new apprenticeship training program initially, their failure to engage in complete and consistent institutional work undermined the incentives to co-invest in the kinds of relationship-specific assets typical of institutions in coordinated market economies (CMEs) (Hall & Soskice, 2001), thus leading to diminishing support, and ultimately to limited institutionalization. We develop the notion of *insufficient institutional work* to explain the puzzle identified at the outset: why do we see stagnation, despite constant institutional work?

THEORETICAL FRAMING

Institutions of work and institutional work

Institutions are commonly understood as stable, more or less taken-for-granted arrangements, which structure the behavior of (collective) actors to a large extent by providing information on what is and ought to be, that is, what is legitimate in a certain environment (Suchman, 1995). For example, Scott conceives of institutions as “comprised of regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide *stability* and *meaning* to social life” (2008: 48; emphases added). While much institutional literature defines the organizational field as the relevant unit of analysis (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), comparative work contrasts institutions across countries (e.g., Hall & Soskice, 2001).

Here, one key observation is that institutions, such as those related to work and education and training, differ vastly across country settings (Clarke, 2011). In Germany, the country setting of our research, these institutions revolve around the notion of the *Beruf*, a particular form of occupational organizing principle resting on cross-stakeholder negotiations (Clarke, 2011; Clarke et al., 2013). Social as well as educational principles, such as skill formation taking place in both schools and firms, distinguish the *Beruf* from other concepts, such as a trade or a job (Clarke, 2011). Unlike the Anglo-Saxon models of professionalism stressing freedom and self-employment, the principle of the *Beruf* rests on tripartite arrangements and a high degree of regulation (Burrage & Thorstendahl, 1990), not least in the area of training and education, where a designated pathway leads to a particular *Beruf*, frequently through an apprenticeship program. These training programs, in turn, can be mapped on the institutional elements laid out in Scott (2008). More specifically, in Germany *rules* exist on how to negotiate and implement training curricula; apprenticeship-based training is a *valued* education pathway into skilled jobs and even middle management positions, and there is the widespread *norm* that businesses are expected to offer apprenticeship positions; finally, there is a shared cognitive *template* of what exactly constitutes apprenticeship training (see Fortwengel & Jackson, 2016).

Notably, institutions of workforce training and education facilitate and support investments in certain types of skills (Hall & Soskice, 2001). For example, the German system of apprenticeship training enables co-investments in relationship-specific assets, because the training programs are often tightly linked to occupational groups and pay structures within an organization. As such, both employers and employees have an incentive to invest in the creation of more industry-specific skills. In Germany's CME, appropriate institutions of training and education are facilitating these types of relationship-specific assets through coordinating the negotiation and implementation across a set of collective actors. In contrast, other country

settings, such as the United States or the United Kingdom, offer institutional incentives to invest in more general skills tradable on markets for training and education. In these Liberal Market Economies (LMEs), collective support is largely missing, disincentivizing co-investments in skills and competencies.

Meanwhile, it is widely understood that institutions are in need of being constantly produced and reproduced. Here, the concept of institutional work has been particularly useful to capture the processes involved as collective actors create, maintain, or disrupt institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2009). For these purposes, actors may use certain appropriate strategies and activities, such as enabling, embedding, and routinizing (see Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 229). Previous research has examined how actors engage with the cognitive, normative, and regulative elements of an institutional environment in their institutional work projects (Fortwengel & Jackson, 2016; Muzio & Faulconbridge, 2013). What is less well understood, however, is why institutional work projects may fail. In fact, existing research on institutional work and entrepreneurship has a strong success bias, meaning that while we know quite a bit about the conditions enabling organizations and other (collective) actors to influence institutional dynamics, and how this process typically unfolds (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009), we know much less about failure cases. Correspondingly, Micelotta et al. (2017: 1893) argue that existing research on institutional dynamics and change “has distracted attention from the possibility that change agents may not succeed in their intended endeavor”, and they go on to claim that “[e]ven less is known about innovations that are introduced, yet fail to achieve institutional change because they never become institutionalized”. In the next section, we lay out how the field setting of professionalization and vocationalization promises to contribute to a better understanding of why institutional innovations may fail to become institutionalized.

Professionalization and vocationalization as institutionalization projects

Unlike functionalist views, which see the formation of a new profession or vocation as the result of dynamics in the societal and organizational division of labor (Goode, 1957; Parsons, 1939), or a political perspective, which claims that professionalization processes unfold as powerful groups try to monopolize certain activities (Freidson, 1986; Larson 1977), institutional theory highlights how professions (and vocations) are both subject to institutional processes yet at the same time also are important “carriers of normative, coercive, and mimetic pressures” (Muzio et al., 2013: 700). It is precisely because of this unique role that professional processes have been identified as a key lever to further advance theorization in institutional theory, not least with regard to the still open issue of why institutional work attempts may fail. Consequently, we build on Suddaby and Viale’s observation that “professional projects carry within them projects of institutionalization” (2011: 424) and examine the creation and subsequent institutionalization of a new apprenticeship training program.¹

Institutionalization is widely conceived as a process phenomenon involving various steps (Helfen, 2015). For example, Lawrence and Suddaby argue that “the process of institutionalization involves an object first being recognized, then accepted by relatively few actors, and then widely diffused and broadly accepted within a field” (2006: 247). Frequently,

¹ Some scholars claim that relatively basic activities and tasks, low unionization, and cost-sensitive labor markets, where higher qualification does not translate into higher productivity, can be seen as barriers to setting standards in terms of qualifications. However, especially in Germany there are a number of cases where actors have been successful in establishing an apprenticeship program despite these seemingly strong barriers. For example, despite its low societal status, limited power potential, and low relevance for productivity, the three-year apprenticeship training as a retail salesperson is—with about 30,000 new apprenticeships per year—one of the most popular vocational training programs. Structural and functional theories struggle to explain these success cases, asking for different kinds of theoretical explanations that capture these processes as contested and open. Relatedly, Clarke et al. (2013) report the successful creation of bricklaying as a qualified occupation in Germany, including the development of ‘occupational capacity.’ Because “[t]he changing nature of construction due to social and economic conditions and continuous technological innovation brings dangers of deskilling and loss of occupational capacity” (Clarke et al., 2013: 946), the creation and institutionalization of bricklaying as an occupation suggests that purely deterministic and functional arguments are of little help in accounting for the creation and subsequent institutionalization of training programs.

this process is understood to be triggered by problematization and theorization (Fortwengel, 2017; Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002), meaning that a particular (perceived) problem is theorized to be solvable by a certain new action or template. Notably, existing research mostly assumes that institutionalization processes are generally successful, resulting in new professional and occupational groups (Hodgson, Paton, & Muzio, 2015) or their successful reform (Muzio & Kirkpatrick, 2011).

These initiatives may also fail, however, or at least be only partly successful, for example when activities toward professionalizing lack effectiveness because of a misalignment between higher-level efforts and the actual behavior on the ground (McCann et al., 2013). In particular, the (potential) emergence and institutionalization of vocational training schemes despite structural impediments, such as an unclear link between training and qualification profiles and productivity, constitutes a promising research field for theory extension (see Lister, Hadfield, Hobbs, & Winlow, 2001). In this paper, we build on existing studies documenting the creation of apprenticeship programs in challenging environments (e.g., Clarke et al., 2013), but add an important angle by exploring why these endeavors may be less successful.

Here, we argue that the activities of institutional work need to address the institutional pillars responsible for stability (Fortwengel & Jackson, 2016). This is not least necessary because of the mutual dependence of (nationwide) regulation and implementation at the firm level. As a result, neither the normative value of vocational training nor the regulation alone is sufficient for successful establishment. Without simultaneous engagement, the outcome is a practice not supported by and embedded in a regulatory framework, or a regulation that is an empty shell and not used and put in practice. Based on Scott's (2008) framework, we thus posit that institutional work for the purpose of professional or vocational projects involves *cognitive*

work, *normative work*, and *regulative work*. While cognitive work describes instances where actors create or maintain particular templates and cognitive models, normative work encompasses all those kinds of activities aiming to create and maintain norms and attach value to certain forms of behavior, and not to others. Finally, regulative work aims to create, maintain or adapt certain sets of rules and regulations in order to support and facilitate certain forms of behavior and practices. Through these activities of institutional work, new (training) practices may be created, diffused, and consolidated at the field level. Notably, insights from comparative work (e.g., Hall & Soskice, 2001) suggest that there may be particular challenges involved in institutional work projects in different country settings. While institutional work aiming at creating or disrupting an institution may need to deviate from existing standards and practice, more ‘conservative’ institutional work for the purpose of maintenance might need to be aligned with the existing institutional framing in order to be effective and successful.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Given our exploratory research question aiming to unearth the process of (limited) institutionalization, we opted for a qualitative case study approach to gather the necessary rich data (Yin, 2009). Previous research highlights the appropriateness of qualitative research designs to study new occupations: “Case studies of occupational emergence are necessary for us to understand how role bundles are formed and organized into a social system” (Blum, Roman, & Tootle, 1988: 112). Single-case studies have unique strengths in building and extending theory (Eisenhardt, 1989), and in addressing *how* and *why* research questions (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) such as the ones addressed in this paper, in which we are interested in understanding how actors try to engage in institutional work as a process phenomenon, and why they may be only partially successful in their endeavor. Qualitative approaches are particularly suitable for process studies (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van

de Ven, 2013), involving questions such as how institutional projects evolve and how they may help create, maintain, or disrupt institutions. Similarly, since institutions are not independent from action and actors, qualitative research is appropriate to study the particular sets of micro activities driving and sustaining institutional processes. In this study, we build on the rich literature at the intersection of institutions and professions or occupations (e.g., McCann et al., 2013) by examining institutional work in the context of the creation of an apprenticeship program in the field of security and protection services.

Research setting

Our study is part of a larger research project examining processes of professionalization and vocationalization over the course of attempts to develop new apprenticeship programs in Germany (Nicklich, 2017). Germany as a high-skill model of a CME (e.g., Hall & Soskice, 2001) rests on a qualification-based organization of work, which is supported by a unique vocational training system involving vocational schools (*Berufsschulen*) as well as employing organizations (Streeck, 1991). Unlike some countries where apprenticeships constitute less formalized training pathways, some of them leading to membership in a profession (Wallenburg, Hopmans, Buljac-Samardzic, den Hoed, & IJzermans, 2016), the skill formation of skilled employees in Germany is organized predominantly around formal and nationwide standardized vocational training, including a certified, portable bundle of occupational skills, which is usually connected to the social status of the employee, as well as particular benefits in terms of pay and compensation. (e.g., Bosch, 2010). Because regulations exist that govern the access to jobs based on the successful completion of an apprenticeship program, these training programs play an important role in creating and sustaining professional and occupational recognition through occupational closure. Therefore, apprenticeship training plays an important

part in the process of institutionalizing a *Beruf*, which “represents a systematized combination of formal knowledge, know-how and experience, not geared to any single workplace and is bound up with a particular system of wage relations” (Clarke et al., 2013: 944).

Research design and case setting

While single-case-study findings do not allow for statistical generalization, that is generalization to a population, they offer unique opportunities for analytical generalization, meaning generalization to theory (Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wicki, 2008). Seawright and Gerring (2008) discuss different case selection techniques and how they can be used to contribute to theory development and refinement. We chose to study the creation of an apprenticeship program in security services in Germany as a revealing case of a stagnating training practice, despite significant attempts by a number of collective actors to engage in institutional work in order to institutionalize it more widely. Studying a case of (presumably) failed institutional work offers unique promise in light of the success bias of much existing research on the topic (see McGaughey, 2013).

The creation of the apprenticeship program for security and protection services has to be seen against the background of broader trends in the economy toward the outsourcing of certain business activities in a wide range of supporting services (see Helfen, Nicklich, & Fortwengel, 2017). Outsourcing tendencies throughout the 1990s led to the creation of new occupational groups (Abbott, 1988; Anteby, Chan, & DiBeningo, 2016), such as the specialist in protection and security services (Briken, 2011), and thus raised the question whether these groups would further professionalize their status by creating an accompanying apprenticeship program, which would contribute to occupational closure and help govern issues of pay and career progression.

As of today, about 339,000 people are engaged in activities relating to security services², and the number continues to rise, not least because of global threats such as terrorism. Security firms offer a broad portfolio of services, ranging from gate service, factory and object protection, airport services and patrols in public transport to providing protection of refugee homes. In most cases, the service is offered at client sites. Corresponding to the rather broad portfolio of services, the apprenticeship training scheme covers the handling of different areas in which security services are engaged, such as factory protection, gate services, entertainment events, and personal security.

To explore (presumably) unsuccessful institutional work projects, we have selected this case setting for two main reasons: first, it is a particularly puzzling case, because the apprenticeship program was successfully introduced and has now existed for about 15 years, despite structural challenges such as low pay and atypical working hours, but its institutionalization is very limited. However, it has not disappeared either, but rather stagnated at a low level. Second, the ongoing nature of this vocationalization project enables us to study in-depth (and, to some extent, in real time) the processes and activities involved in institutional work. We thus leverage this research setting to explore broader questions of institutional work in the context of the development of a vocation and the associated occupation-based training scheme, in order to theorize why and when institutional work may be only partially successful. In our case setting, an apprenticeship program signifies some relevant recognition as a legitimate occupation, similar to processes we see in the emergence of professions (Hodgson et al., 2015). It also

² About 265,000 of these employees are working in the private security service industry. The rest is employed by firms with a different main business.

contributes to the creation of a particular occupational social group, involving significant moments of belonging, identity, and a sense of community (Goode, 1957).

Data collection and analysis

Our primary data source is interview data, which constitutes appropriate qualitative data to explore processes of institutionalization and the connected motivation of and interpretation by collective actors on a meso level. Our aim was to take into account that “people’s knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties of the social reality” (Mason, 2002: 63). Because the creation and subsequent institutionalization of an apprenticeship program involves a multitude of actors, not least due to the coordinated nature of Germany’s institutional setting, we conducted interviews with a variety of representatives from key organizations, such as employer associations, labor unions, and security firms. These accounts from different perspectives help us to capture multiple experiences, views, and activities as institutional work unfolds.

In total, we conducted 25 semi-structured interviews (with 28 respondents).³ Table 1 below provides information on our interview respondents and the broader research design of our study. We used an interview guideline for conducting our interviews, but also allowed interview respondents to share their own experiences and viewpoints by asking open-ended questions. Our study is longitudinal in two ways: first, we have conducted our research over a four-year period (2012-2016). Second, we have probed our respondents by asking retrospective questions aiming to unearth the process of institutional work associated with the creation of a new apprenticeship program as integral part of the vocationalization project. As such, our empirical

³ A few of those interviews were conducted with multiple interviewees at the same time, similar to what is known as focus group interviews.

data covers the whole period of the creation of the apprenticeship program in the security services industry, starting when collective actors began envisioning a training program to create a proper *Beruf*.

A wide range of archival data helped us to take a longitudinal process perspective. While interviews constitute an excellent data source to examine processes and activities over time, they have a few inherent weaknesses, such as the problem of ex-post-rationalization and sensemaking (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). In order to take these potential weaknesses into account, we contextualized and triangulated our data by compiling a large case database containing 41 archival documents on the creation of the new vocation of the ‘specialist in protection and security.’ Here, articles published in the magazine of the employer association proved a particularly fruitful data source.

Type	Dimension	Criteria	Source	
Semi-Structured interviews (Σ 25)	Ongoing process to create ‘specialist in protection and security’	Practices of regulative, normative, and cognitive work	Public authorities (Σ 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Federal institute of vocational training (FIV) - Chamber of industry and commerce (federal level)(CIC_F) - Chamber of industry and commerce (state level) (CIC_S)
			Social partner (Σ 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employer association (EA_1) - Employer association (EA_2) - Employer association (EA_3) - Union representative (U_1) - Union representative (U_2)
			Service firms (Σ 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managing director (MA_SF_1) - Managing director (MA_SF_2) - HR manager (MA_SF_3) - HR manager (MA_SF_4) - HR manager (MA_SF_5) - Training manager (MA_SF_6) - Training manager (MA_SF_7) - Training manager (MA_SF_8) - Branch manager (MA_SF_9) - Branch manager (MA_SF_10) - Branch manager (MA_SF_11) - Facility manager (MA_SF_12) - Facility manager (MA_SF_13) - Facility manager (MA_SF_14) - Facility manager (MA_SF_15) - Facility manager (MA_SF_16) - Work council (WC_1)
Analysis of formal documents		Institutionalization of ‘specialist in protection and security’	Curriculum of ‘specialist in protection and security’ (Ausbildungsordnung)	
Secondary contextualizing material			41 documents: Material regarding the history of the qualification profile (<i>Berufsbild</i>); campaign material; statistics offered by employer association; federal statistics	

Table 1: Research design and data collection.

Data analysis involved three main steps. First, we ordered our data chronologically and created a case narrative, whereby we bracketed the development of the newly developed vocation temporally (Langley, 1999). Here, we made use of existing conceptualizations of institutionalization as evolving over three distinct phases—*initiation*, *establishment*, as well as *diffusion and consolidation* (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Barley & Tolbert, 1997). Second, we mapped the activities related to institutional work onto the dimensions discussed in the theory section: *cognitive work*, *normative work*, and *regulative work*. Third, we linked this back to the temporal order of the data to examine the relative degree of ‘success’ of institutional work in our case setting as a function of the degree of institutionalization, that is, the successful diffusion and consolidation. This then paves the way to theorize why we observe only limited institutionalization of the new apprenticeship program. As such, we use our qualitative process data to engage in theory refinement and extension at the intersection of professional, occupational, and institutional processes.

IS IT ENOUGH TO GET THE WORK HALF DONE? INSTITUTIONALIZING AN APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM FOR SECURITY SERVICES

Table 2 below outlines a chronology of key events in the process of institutional work for the purpose of creating and institutionalizing an apprenticeship program for security services in Germany’s CME. We structure our empirical case material temporally to span three distinct phases: (1) initiation, (2) establishment, and (3) diffusion and consolidation. In each phase, we discuss the activities and outcomes of the three bundles of institutional work practices: cognitive, normative, and regulative work. Because we are particularly interested in understanding why the new program stagnates at a low level, we focus our attention on exploring institutional work during the third phase of (limited) diffusion and consolidation.

Phase	Year	Event	Key actors involved
Initiation	1992	Concrete considerations about a vocation in security services	Employers Employer association
	1993	First talks between the responsible union and employer association, resulting in a memorandum of understanding concerning the establishment of a vocational training scheme	Union Employer association
	1995	Study to identify the demand within the industry	Employer association
	1996	In order to increase the quality norm, professionalism as well as employment conditions, unions and employer associations on a European level advocate for an improvement of vocational training in the field of security services	Union Employer association
		Proposal by the Coordinating Association of German Industry for Vocational Education (<i>Kuratorium der Deutschen Wirtschaft fuer Berufsbildung</i>) for a two-year vocational training Introduction of a legal barrier regarding the possibility to enter the field, §34a Trade Regulation Act (<i>Gewerbeordnung, GewO</i>)	Public authorities Government
Establishment	1999	Unions and employer association agree on the introduction of a three-year vocational training	Union Employer association
	2000	Constitution of an expert commission at the Federal Institute of Vocational Training (<i>Bundesinstitut fuer Berufsbildung, BIBB</i>) to develop the curriculum and qualification profile of the vocation	Public authorities
	2001	Introduction of the approval procedure Development of the curriculum and qualification profile	Unions Employer association Public authorities
Diffusion and consolidation	2002	Enactment of the curriculum ‘specialist in protection and security services’ by the Federal Ministry of Environment and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research First applicants start their apprenticeship as ‘specialists in protection and security services’	Public authorities Government
	2003	Introduction of the ‘Meister’ qualification	Government
	2007	First time 1000 new apprentice contracts are signed since introduction (see also Figure 1 below)	
	2013	Scandal at security services of amazon: harassment and surveillance of temporary workers (also accommodation)	Employers
	2014	Scandal at security services in a refugee home: physical abuse of refugees by employees of service firms	Employers
	- 2016	Lobbying the state to raise the legal entry barrier	Union
		Attempts to increase the value of the activity	Employers
		Attempts to illustrate the necessity of the vocational training Attempts to change the image of the security services	Employer association

Table 2: Chronology of key events.

Phase of initiation (1990-1997)

Given the situation in which the actors formulated first ideas and articulated (perceived) needs regarding the qualification of employees in the newly emerging field, the following incidents can be assigned to the initiation phase of the institutionalization project. For a long time, security services had not been a part of the German vocational training system, which means that the key actors, such as the unions, employer association, and the service firms, first had to deliberately engage in *cognitive work* to put the activity on the map and position it vis-à-vis the existing vocational training system. More specifically, this involved activities aiming at creating new and appropriate templates and cognitive schemas, in order to create a common understanding to make sense of the world. One core aspect, which was supported by different collective actors, was the promise that the new training scheme could help overcome reputational problems of the industry: “[The industry] has a need for amendment, not only regarding vocational training, but also regarding its overall reputation among the public. (...) We said: we want to overcome this night-watchman-image” (MA_SF_3).⁴ Moreover the unions, added a different view on the issue, in the process emphasizing the *normative* aspect of qualification. They argued that changes in terms of activities and tasks in the field made a vocational training program necessary. In their initial thought processes about the potential formalization of skills, the various actors thus related their institutional work activities to the image of the field and evaluated the job tasks in comparison to other and previous job descriptions. This is not least because of the fact that although security services were gaining more and more in relevance, the organizations did not feel that others took them seriously:

⁴ All quotes are translated from German into English.

“I am able to explain to every police officer and every firefighter what is going on, because often I have more experience than they have. (...) But if they hear ‘security’, they say: ‘they have no idea. They had better shut up’” (MA_SF_12).

By formalizing—including certificates—skill formation, the employers wanted to change this perception and redraft the cognitive map of the actors involved.

While newly emerging job roles and positions in the area of security and protection services raised the question of how to categorize and classify this emerging phenomenon, it was not before the early 1990s that actors entered the phase of initiation, when they started to engage in preliminary considerations regarding the creation and *regulation* of a three-year, standardized training scheme, which would make a vocation into a *Beruf*. Particularly, the collective actors met for first dialogues in order to communicate the need for qualification and training among the employees and how they intended to meet it. Discussions ensued as to whether to create a special apprenticeship program providing the necessary skills and competencies for the new vocation.

According to the employer association, the initiative came from the companies in the industry themselves: “We have received requests from our members, ‘please engage in the issue of qualification. My customers are asking for qualified staff.’ And for this reason, we started to engage” (EA_1). We thus observe a ‘qualification campaign’—a term used by the employer association—starting in the mid-1990s, in a field which was characterized by lateral entrants.

In the course of this process, the employer association started to talk to the union in 1992 and a declaration of intent to create a new vocation was formalized. With a further survey conducted among the members of the association, a need for vocational training was articulated in 1995. One year after that, a first barrier to entering the market of security services was established.

§34a of the trade regulation act (*Gewerbeordnung, GewO*) allows people to work in this field after completing a basic course (40 hours with a two-hour-exam at the end). Nevertheless, the regulation of qualification within the field was confusing. Against the background of abundant measures to qualify its employees, the industry was shaped by high complexity regarding the qualification profiles of the employees. This was seen as problematic for the service providers themselves but also for their clients. In order to change the cognition of the activities in the field and to offer an orientation for clients and employers as well as to give the employees appropriate appreciation, the actors decided to regulate the skill formation via a standardized three-year apprenticeship. Particularly the construction of employees' identities seems to be a central aspect for their relationship to and within the broader field of the industry. This illustrates one main observation that, in this phase especially, cognition was central to the institutional work activities.

After these initial years, there was a shift from the question *whether* there should be a vocational training scheme toward the question of *how* this should be implemented. Nevertheless, there were still discussions about the length and nature of the formalization, for example whether this should involve an apprenticeship program within the existing dual system of vocational training, or rather just a further training program. In the late 1990s, the social partners decided to create a new vocation in the field of security services, indicating significant *regulative work* in the sense that rules and regulations were to be set in place. This marks the beginning of the second phase in this institutional work project, where actors also engaged in activities related to *normative work*, in order to convey a consistent and attractive image of the sector, its organizations, and employees offering protection and security services, through the creation and institutionalization of a newly initiated apprenticeship program.

Phase of establishment (1997-2002)

Entering a phase in which the unions, employer association, and public actors developed formal training schemes, a process of formalization started, which can be bracketed to span the phase of establishment. The activities involved in this phase cluster around the dominant form of *regulative work*, since the prevailing task was to build up rules and formalize previous skill formation activities. Regulative work comprises the creation of new rules to support the institutionalization of the new vocation.

The circulation procedure for the approval process started at the turn of the millennium, i.e. almost 10 years after the process had been initiated. Various tensions emerged during the negotiations within the commission of experts, mandated by unions, public actors, and representatives from the service firms. Besides the structure and duration of the training, the content was also a contested issue in the discussions between unions and employer associations. The employees of the sector are represented by the German service union (ver.di), which is, however, not very powerful in that particular field. Due to the fragmentation of the industry's employees, the union faces difficult conditions to reach the employees and build up a common consciousness: "Most of the employees [of the service providers] think that they belong to the client's industry" (U_1). Although there were common negotiations, the employer association also highlighted the low degree of union density and doubted the union's ability to contribute to the institutionalization:

"In our industry, the union density is rather low, to put it mildly. Accordingly, the manpower in the organization [union] is weak. Sure, there are some good representatives, who are motivated. But they are not only responsible for security services but for various services such as hairdressers, prostitutes, but security services as well" (EA_1).

Despite this rather weak position, the union succeeded in rejecting a short two-year version of the vocational training scheme. In addition, various other aspects were negotiated, such as the definition of the formal membership of the occupational group, the hierarchical status of the qualified employees, as well as the content and the conditions, as was described in the employer association's magazine as follows:

“While unrestricted access to the apparently unregulated and low-qualified sector was appreciated in terms of labor market policy, the representatives of the industry attribute great importance to professional competences, as well as to the development of particular curricula. They are supported by the union. But the union uses these formal qualifications to start negotiations about working time, working conditions and payment. From the employer's perspective, this, however, limits the necessary flexibility of the service providers” (Stüllenberg, 2003: 23).

This means that while all the actors within the security industry supported the regulation of skill formation, the employers negated the union's demands regarding the regulation of employee rights, such as a certain level of income and job security, connected with the vocational training. These elements were seen as extra skills, first and foremost creating costs but offering no direct benefit for the employing organization. In a field characterized by high cost pressure, the employers did not want to include these extra skills. This is not least the case because of client demands: “Most of the clients are not willing to pay the extra costs [for qualification]” (EA_1). The importance of the clients' opinion on this issue was also emphasized in another article published in the magazine of the employer association: recognition by the client is important, since “the service provider is financed by the client's demand potential. (...) This means that the service providers cannot train their employees randomly, which means without the demand of the client firm” (Schmidt, 1999: 20).

These discussions eventually led to the creation of a certified vocation for a ‘specialist in protection and security’ in 2002. As is the case with other apprenticeship programs, this vocational training program lasts three years and consists of legal, administrative, as well as technical elements. Releasing a curriculum involves the enactment of a rule system, which defines what should be done in terms of the duration and content in order to get the certificate and become a member of the vocation. Especially the definition of its own appellation as an act of *cognitive work* leads to clear enclosure of the occupational group, thereby purposing the development of an own (community) identity (see Schmidt, 1999).

With the establishment of the apprenticeship program, the process enters the stage of diffusion and consolidation, in which (collective) actors try to spread and diffuse the new practices of vocational training in the field.

Phase of diffusion and consolidation (2002-2016)

Our empirical case material suggests that the phase of diffusion and consolidation is the most complex phase in the process of institutionalization, involving significant moments of *regulative work*, *cognitive work*, and *normative work*, performed by employer associations and unions in particular, in order to advance the institutionalization of the new vocation in the field of security services. We first describe these ongoing efforts, before exploring why the outcome is stagnation, despite considerable institutional work.

Ongoing efforts of institutional work

The issue of raising barriers in terms of legally necessary qualifications is one central aspect of the ongoing *regulative work*. Lobbying the state toward the establishment of a corresponding regulation seems to be a central strategy in this regard. With such a powerful form of

occupational closure in place, the actors expect a greater demand for the specialist in protection and security.

Related to considerations regarding the three pillars of an institutional environment and the idea that institutionalization varies in degree (Barley & Tolbert, 1997), we find that actors engage in *normative* and *cognitive work* as well. Our case material suggests that actors pursue *normative work*, in the sense of reproducing the norm and belief system that apprenticeship is a valued and legitimate type of training route in this particular industry as well. For example, the management of the service firms highlights an image problem, largely because of scandals triggered by a few ‘rotten apples,’ which employed insufficiently qualified staff. We find that actors regard the newly certified vocation as one possible mechanism to prevent such scandals from occurring in the future:

“Security is a principle that you cannot grasp. We do not produce anything directly valuable for the client. We are there for them, they know that they need us (...) but do not want to dig deep into their pocket” (MA_SF_13).

Nevertheless, in their arguments aiming to gather support for the vocational training the service providers refer to the clients' material interests and the contribution of vocational training:

“The client entrusts us with objects often worth millions. In the evening, he leaves the site and we have to take care. Then he usually has the expectation that there will be an employee who knows what to do. For this, a four- or six-week course is not enough” (MA_SF_5).

In their daily interaction with the client a service provider describes their task with an analogy:

“In a bakery the white bread costs 1.90 whereas the wholemeal bread costs 4.90. Then it is my task as a baker to explain to you why the wholemeal bread is better for the client. But if the client decides,

he will choose the cheap one. But as a baker I have to explain that it is important because of the nutrients, vital parameters, health (...), I need to sell it” (MA_SF_8).

In negotiations over business contracts the service providers “want to convince the clients of the additional value of vocational training. Because in our view, all the other employees are unskilled workers with only the legal preconditions” (MA_SF_8). By mobilizing normative resources when referring to the pre-structured frames of certified vocations, the actors try to illustrate the perceived necessity of the qualification by disclosing negative examples in the field, which we interpret as representing normative work. Previous research discusses similar activities as theorization, whereby actors frame a particular activity as solution to a (perceived) problem (Fortwengel, 2017).

For this purpose, the actors relate to classic images of vocational training. But institutional work in this phase also involves *cognitive work*. More broadly, it refers to the creation of certain appropriate boxes for actors to use and refer to in their quest to categorize real-world phenomena (see Whittle, Housley, Gilchrist, Mueller, & Lenney, 2015): “If people think about security services today, they still think about the bald-headed doorman of a nightclub [...] but we have to communicate that the activities here are more complex” (MA_SF_3). To do this, actors leverage a set of resources, such as the magazine of the employer association but also an image film on the Internet, suggesting that institutional work comprises various activities, involving attempts aiming to influence the dominant discourse.⁵

From an employer perspective, the motivation for doing so is twofold. On the one hand, the service providers have to secure their workforce. Therefore, the industry and its jobs have to be

⁵ <http://www.berufe.tv/ausbildungsberufe/dienstleistung/fachkraft-schutz-und-sicherheit/> (Last access: 12.05.2017).

legitimate and signal attractiveness—the status of a proper *Beruf*—to potential applicants. On the other hand, this should also improve the status of the activity within the organization and the networks of production that surround these service providers. With the standardized training scheme, they hope to reduce their replaceability and ensure that the service employees are seen as experts. Similar to professions, occupational groups rely on their expertise, which needs to be acknowledged by other groups and stakeholders (Abbott, 1988) in order to be recognized as professionals in a certain service area.

From the union perspective, the hope is expressed that further institutionalization can help regulate the access to the labor market. This refers not least to the link between certification and collective agreements on pay and benefits. By building on classic connotations in the area of work organization, the unions want to structure access and control the supply of the workforce. Moreover, union actors are aware that their chances for organizing increase with the employment of people who have a proper qualification (Beck, Brater, & Daheim, 1980). Importantly, this suggests that institutional work in this case comprises a set of collective actors who share an interest in the vocational project, and thus work together to achieve a common goal. This is all the more interesting because it brings together two types of actors that are usually at odds with each other—capital and labor.

Despite these clear efforts toward institutional work, we find that the new apprenticeship practice is not widely adopted. Over time, the absolute number of apprentices in the program ‘specialist in protection and security’ shows that although there was a continuous increase after its introduction in 2002 initially, for almost a decade now the development has been stagnant (see Figure 1). In 2014, only 2.2 percent of the employees had completed the training, which suggests that there is no clear cognitive, normative, and regulative link between the

apprenticeship training program and the particular occupation. Moreover, the dropout rate, at 45.9 percent, is one of the highest in Germany (in comparison to 24.4 percent overall). This clearly indicates that institutionalization, and diffusion and consolidation, of the new apprenticeship training practice is very low, and stagnant, despite the continuous efforts of collective actors to engage in institutional work. This raises the question of why institutional work in this case was insufficient, to which we turn next.

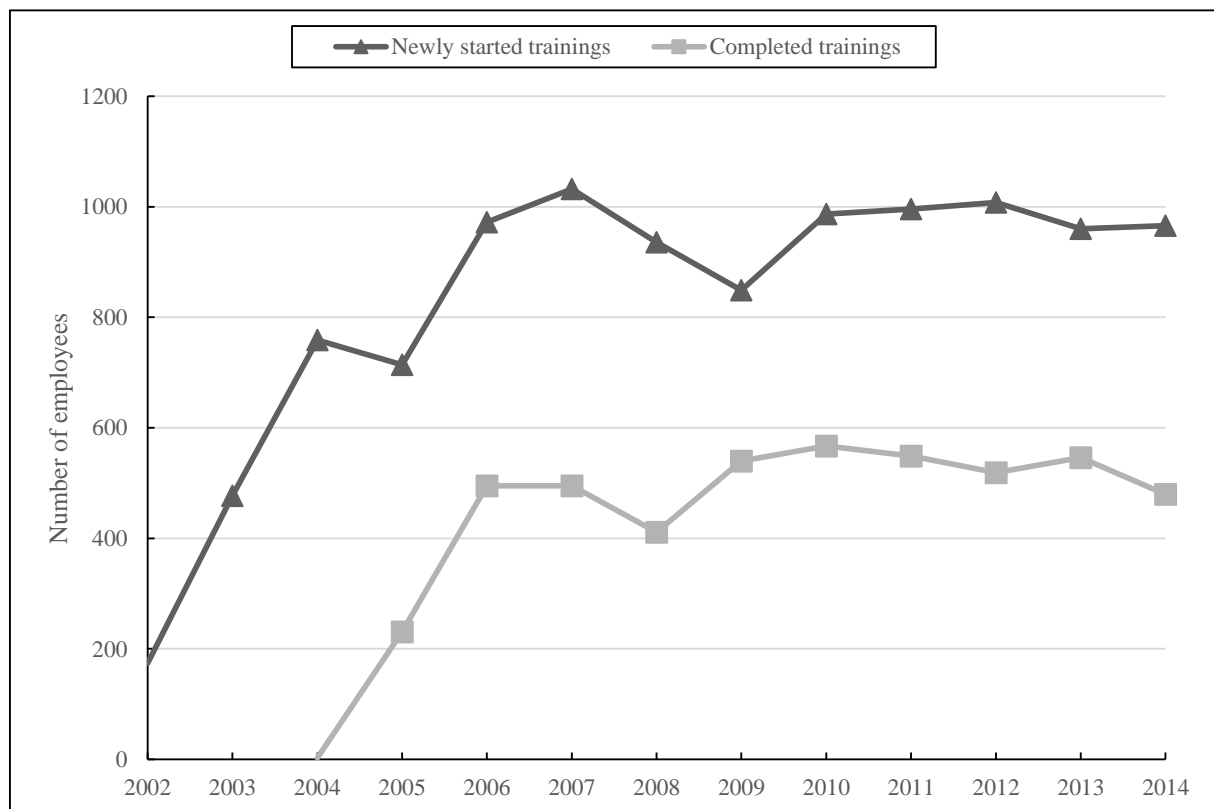


Figure 1: Number of newly started and completed trainings (2002-2014) (Source: Own compilation based on BIBB, 2014⁶).

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[https://www2.bibb.de/bibbtools/de/ssl/2243.php?attribute=5&countries\[\]=30&occupations\[\]=53112010&year=0&selection=true&departmentSelectionSbmt=anzeigen](https://www2.bibb.de/bibbtools/de/ssl/2243.php?attribute=5&countries[]=30&occupations[]=53112010&year=0&selection=true&departmentSelectionSbmt=anzeigen);
<https://www2.bibb.de/bibbtools/de/ssl/2243.php?attribute=2&countries%5B%5D=30&occupations%5B%5D=53112010&year=9&selection=true&departmentSelectionSbmt=anzeigen> (Last access: 14.12.2016).

Stagnation as a result of incomplete and inconsistent institutional work

One important observation is that the outsourcing activities that created the new security industry in the first place are now exerting significant cost pressures, since there is an expectation that these services will be offered cheaper compared to price levels achieved by previously integrated organizations (see Doellgast, Sarmiento-Mirwaldt, & Benassi, 2016). In this sense, the apprenticeship program and qualified employees are understood not only from the employer's but also the client's perspective as costs to be minimized. As such, we make a similar observation to McCann et al. (2013), who also identify relevant contradictions in terms of demands for up-skilling and better pay on the one hand, and increased cost pressure and the role of performance metrics on the other. This nicely illustrates that institutional work in this—and probably most other cases—does not occur without tensions and contradictions, highlighting the political dimension of institutional work processes.

Hence, although most of the actors support the diffusion rhetorically, on an operational level the appropriate work assignment is somewhat questioned. One major shortcoming is that these actors were not successful in institutionalizing strong links between the apprenticeship and formal job roles, including pay and benefits as well as occupational status. This means that even if an employee passed the vocational training process, in daily work often “the employee earns as much as his colleague [without this vocational certificate]” (MA_SF_7). Although actors refer to moral foundations, such as the positive labor market effects for (low-skilled) workers, a representative of the operational management in the field states that there are no designated positions within the firms for people who have completed the apprenticeship program. Unlike what is often suggested in *normative work*, this means that the possibility to build a career cannot be realized, undermining incentives to invest in this pathway and putting limits on the

formation of a sense of community: “I have always got a bad feeling if it is sold to the potential employees that when they have passed the training scheme they can get a management position (...) because this is not true” (MA_SF_5). This is confirmed by another management representative: “The claim: ‘First you will be an apprentice and after that you will get a management position’ is completely wrong” (MA_SF_6).

The cost pressure that is put on the employers of security personnel is also reflected in the actual compensation of qualified employees. Although the compensation differs according to qualification levels, within day-to-day practice this is often not realized in the work assignment. The problem in this respect is formulated by a management representative as follows:

“Unfortunately, it [the qualification] has nothing to do with the compensation. (...) According to the collective agreement, if the client asks for a ‘normal’ security guard, it does not matter what qualification the employee has. The employee is paid according to this [the client’s demand]. So, it might be that you have passed a three-year apprenticeship but you are paid like a ‘normal’ employee” (MA_SF_5).

A regulation to change this in favor of the employees is prevented, not least because of the organizational weakness of the unions. What is more, the employers try to make the qualified employees more attractive for the client by minimizing the difference in pay between qualified and non-qualified employees.

This means that the *regulative work*, intending to lay the foundation for institutional work toward the creation of the vocation, is shaped by cost pressure, thereby leading to the somewhat paradoxical situation that the regulation undermines the diffusion of the new practice, rather than supporting it. This is the case because this regulation decouples the classical associations of vocational training, nonetheless referred to in the *normative work*, from the substantive

implementation. In consequence, the incentive to engage in the apprenticeship program is reduced.

To summarize our empirical case material, we find that collective actors were successful in creating a new vocation and apprenticeship program for the ‘specialist in protection and security’ by engaging in *regulative*, *normative*, and *cognitive work* in the first two phases of the institutionalization process. Meanwhile, in the third and final phase, the diffusion and consolidation of the new practice turns out to be very limited. Although the actors refer to classical expectations of vocational training—such as a higher income and the possibility of a career—in their *normative work* activities, critical parts of the *regulative work* undermine efforts to diffuse the new practice. In this latter phase, we identify especially practices of valorizing, in which the actors refer to positive associations with vocational training to consolidate the new practice vis-à-vis different recipients, such as clients or potential employees. By applying these activities of valorizing, the employers in particular mobilize normative resources, thereby omitting the need for enabling, which involves the creation of appropriate sets of supporting rules. In consequence, supporting rules and regulations are absent, or rules even exist that may undermine investments in relationship-specific assets as typical of CMEs. Similar to what has been described as disconnecting sanctions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), we find that in our case setting there is an intriguing absence of linkage between rewards and sanctions vis-à-vis behavior in the training sphere. As a consequence, actors undermine their own incentives to engage in further institutional work for the purpose of institutionalization. Table 3 below summarizes our empirical findings by illustrating the various institutional work activities and outcomes over the three distinct phases: initiation, establishment, and diffusion and consolidation.

Phase	Period	Type and intensity of institutional work	Exemplary quotes	Key actors	Institutional work outcome
Initiation	1990-1997	Cognitive: Strong Normative: Moderate Regulative: Weak	<p>“The activities have changed. You do not have the gatekeeper with his coffee and newspaper anymore, instead there are really demanding tasks (...) [and] the qualified activities have increased” (U_1).</p> <p>“[The industry] has a need for amendment, not only regarding vocational training, but also regarding its overall reputation among the public. (...) We said: we want to overcome this night-watchman-image” (MA_SF_3).</p> <p>In terms of qualification the “offer [of different further training], partly from obscure providers, (...) varied in content and was not comparable for companies and clients” (EA_3).</p>	Unions, Employers, Employer association	Security services were framed as a field suitable for an apprenticeship program: Successful initiation
Establishment	1997-2002	Cognitive: Moderate Normative: Moderate Regulative: Strong	<p>To strengthen the employee’s identity “it was necessary to develop a consistent occupational profile for the whole industry” (EA_2).</p> <p>In terms of necessity and status of qualified employees it is stated: “we don't just need foremen, we also need worker bees” (MA_SF_9).</p> <p>“There was an expert commission, which debated or eventually fixed the content of the vocational training. Besides ver.di, the DGB [umbrella organization of German unions] was also involved” (EA_1).</p>	Unions, Public Authorities, Government, Employer association	The apprenticeship program was formally created and the status of qualified employees was specified: Successful establishment
Diffusion and consolidation	2002-2016	Cognitive: Strong Normative: Strong Regulative: Weak	<p>“The specialist in protection and security is versatile. You have to look at the complete training scheme (...), these people are all-rounders” (MA_SF_6).</p> <p>Vocational training “is no longer just optional icing on the cake; now, in order to survive against merciless competition, it is necessary for the providers to recognize, use, and develop the potentials of their employees” (Ochs 2003: 24).</p> <p>“We have made sure in our collective agreement that the qualified worker is not that far away from the non-qualified worker [in terms of pay]. Because we wanted the clients to buy the qualified worker” (MA_SF_6).</p>	Unions, Employers, Employer association	Failure to produce links between the apprenticeship program and pay and status undermines incentives to engage in co-investments: Failed diffusion and consolidation

Table 3: Summary of the process of (limited) institutionalization.

DISCUSSION

Most existing research on institutional projects looks at success cases, for example effective attempts at institutional entrepreneurship whereby actors engage with the three interrelated pillars of an institutional environment (Fortwengel & Jackson, 2016). However, this reflects an inherent bias because institutional projects that failed or practices that did not diffuse widely are difficult to study (Jonsson, 2009; McGaughey, 2013). Thus, we still know significantly less about why and when institutional work projects may fail. This study deals with the empirical puzzle that actors created a new apprenticeship program as part of their vocationalization project to create a new *Beruf* in Germany—the ‘specialist in protection and security’—but with limited success: institutionalization of the new apprenticeship training is very low, as indicated, for example, by the number of apprentices. Furthermore, in 2015, only about 2 per cent of the workforce in the protection and security services industry has a certificate of completion of the training program, meaning that occupational closure is severely limited. How can we explain the successful creation but then unsuccessful institutionalization of a new apprenticeship program?

Previous studies suggest that successful institutional work involves engagement with all three interdependent pillars of an institutional setting—the regulative, normative, and cognitive dimensions (e.g., Fortwengel & Jackson, 2016). Building on yet also extending this idea, we suggest, based on our case material, that the failure to do so explains the limited success of institutional work in our case setting. Here, we illustrate how the process of institutionalizing the apprenticeship program for the specialist in protection and security evolved over three distinct phases: initiation, establishment, and diffusion and consolidation. While actors engage in *cognitive*, *normative*, and *regulative work* along all three phases, we find that each phase is characterized by a particular, focused cluster of institutional work practices. While in the phase

of initiation, the actors concentrate first and foremost on *cognitive work*, involving practices of constructing identities, mimicry, and theorizing, the focus in the following phase is centered around *regulative work*, in which actors engage in practices of regulating and formalizing the ideas of the initiation phase, such as advocacy, defining, enabling, policing, and deterring (see Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The phase of diffusion or consolidation, however, is more complex, because here actors need to spread the institutional structures and simultaneously maintain these same structures. While in our case the actors were quite successful in the phases 1 and 2, due to a focus on practices of valorizing while omitting practices of enabling, they failed to diffuse the new practice in the third phase, resulting in stagnation and limited institutionalization. Focusing on structural factors, such as technical necessity or the power of a particular occupational group performing the tasks, cannot fully explain this intriguing observation of an empirical case involving the successful legal introduction of a training scheme and ongoing institutional work, but limited diffusion and institutionalization.

Tracing institutional work activities over time, we unpack how the institutional work in our case setting is not only incomplete, in the sense that it does not address all three pillars in conjunction, but also inconsistent, meaning that it does not align with and reproduce the existing logic of Germany as a CME fostering investments in relationship-specific assets. As a result, we find that while initially there was a broad consensus across stakeholders in favor of implementing an apprenticeship program to address skill deficiencies and reputational problems, their failure to engage in complete and consistent institutional work undermined the appropriate incentive structure to commit to the necessary co-investments. This is not least the case because of the different interest of unions and employers in vocational training. While the union tries to consolidate the vocational training program to improve employment conditions, the employers are motivated mainly by securing resources with the help of the newly designed

apprenticeship program, such as attracting new employees and signaling increased reputation vis-à-vis potential clients. As such, our empirical case material illustrates how the particular actions and non-actions of collective actors are recursively related to their own incentive structure, which may result in diminishing support as a result of misaligned institutional work. Furthermore, our study addresses the still under-theorized role of politics in processes of institutional work, and shows how different interests across actor groups can influence the process outcome.

Our study contributes to existing literature in three main ways. For one, we highlight that while in past research “[a]ctors are often portrayed as facing an all-or-nothing decision” (Etzion, 2014: 434), our empirical findings indicate that a more nuanced view of organizational actors and what they do is appropriate. Usually, agency is conceptualized as involving the purposeful creation (or maintenance or disruption) of a particular institution, in order to foster or defend one’s interests and objectives. This suggests a rather rational and heroic notion of agency. However, our case material suggests that in creating this new vocation, actors drew on familiar cognitive templates, established norms and values, and existing rules and regulations, in order to apply these—almost habitually (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998)—to newly emerging phenomena. Our findings thus show that there are particular efforts by interested actors associated with processes of institutional work, while in turn these interests and preferences are structured by the historically situated institutional context (see Jackson, 2010). Building on, but also extending this literature, we also show how the (in-)effectiveness of their institutional work activities has implications for the interests and preferences of the actors, in the sense that it may undermine their motivation to engage in further institutional work.

Second, we identify three clusters of practices of institutional work, and we find that actors engage in these activities in non-random ways over the course of the process: cognitive, normative, and regulative work. While this implies a certain form of sequence, we develop the argument that institutional work activities will need to engage with all three pillars in conjunction, because a particular cognitive model needs to be created, it has to be normatively valued, and it needs to be embedded in and sustained by appropriate rules and regulations (see Fortwengel & Jackson, 2016). Here, a key finding of this study is that the institutional work in our case setting was only partially successful and ‘incomplete.’ More specifically, our empirical data suggest that while actors focused their efforts on cognitive and normative work during the critical diffusion and consolidation phase, meaning that support was gathered for the cognitive understanding that security services lend themselves to an apprenticeship program, and that this should be valued normatively in order to overcome skill gaps and reputational deficiencies faced by the industry, regulative work was only conducted partially. In particular, while rules and regulations were set in place to create the program in 2002, actors failed to ensure a strong link between graduating from the program and particular pay and benefits structures, as well as social status. Due to this incomplete institutional work, we see the *Beruf* formally established yet with limited institutionalization. As such, we illustrate on the basis of our case material—and in contrast to the widespread assumption of a consistent interest driving the increasing institutionalization of particular practices—how incompleteness of institutional work might occur. This advances our understanding of institutional work as a process phenomenon, evolving over three distinct phases, which influences the outcome of the institutional work project. Previous research explains limited diffusion by referring to the extent to which a new practice deviates from previously existing patterns of behavior (Jonsson, 2009), or more generally the opposition and contentiousness it encounters over the diffusion process (Sanders

& Tuschke, 2007). Our study extends this literature by adding the important observation that limited diffusion may be due to *incomplete* institutional work—getting the work half done does not (always) suffice.

We make the important link back to the role of relationship-specific assets in Germany as a CME (Hall & Soskice, 2001) to explain why the failure to reproduce regulative foundations enabling co-investments in these relationships proved so consequential in our case setting. Thus, our third contribution is to offer insights into the relationship between institutional work activities and the three pillars of an institutional environment by arguing that *inconsistency* leads to the failure to reproduce the broader logic of a particular environment, which helps explain contextualized outcomes of institutional work projects. More specifically, our data reveals how employers in particular aimed to reap the benefits of an apprenticeship program without reciprocating with appropriate co-investments in relationship-specific assets—as such, actors aimed to create a new training program as ‘beneficial without constraint’ (see Streeck, 1997) in the sense of using the positive and reputational effects of a training scheme but not being constrained by collectively agreed (higher) wages. Building on this, our study puts forward the argument that institutional work, at least the kind aimed at the maintenance of an institution, may need to be consistent with or fit the existing logic of a particular institutional setting, and failure to reproduce this logic results in practice stagnation and severely limited institutionalization.

In sum, both the *incomplete* and *inconsistent* nature of the institutional work project in our case setting explains why the institutional work toward the creation of an apprenticeship program in the field of security and protection services was *insufficient*, resulting in stagnant apprentice numbers. More broadly, our study indicates that whether projects of institutional work are

successful or not will depend not only on activities along the three pillars of an institutional environment, but also on distinct institutional context conditions, and the particular challenges they pose for such work processes. Here, we develop the notion of *insufficient institutional work* to capture this phenomenon. This opens up exciting avenues for future research along the lines of comparative studies on institutional work projects in different institutional settings, which we will discuss next.

Limitations and research frontiers

Our study has a number of limitations which open up exciting areas for future research. Perhaps most obviously, our research is based on a single-case study of institutional work in the field of Germany's apprenticeship system. We see promise in comparative studies, which could contrast our findings with the results of studies examining institutional work in settings which are less stable and institutionalized. Not least due to their embeddedness in different versions of capitalism, professions and occupations are a fruitful research context to advance our knowledge in this regard (see Brock, Leblebici, & Muzio, 2014). For example, institutional work in newly created professions might constitute a unique process, not least because in these settings actors will be less able to draw on existing templates, norms, and rules, as was the case in our setting, where collective actors drew heavily on existing institutions of workforce training and education. Furthermore, institutional processes in the field of professions may involve distinct practices and dynamics because professions are largely self-governed (Adams, 2017). While professional associations frequently play an important role in representing and furthering the interests of a particular profession (Abbott, 1988; Hodgson et al., 2015), professions are largely autonomous in defining their relationships and positions vis-à-vis other professions and additional stakeholders (e.g., Kahl, King, & Liegel, 2016). This has implications for processes

of institutionalization and the diffusion of innovations (Adler & Kwon, 2013), insofar as professions are both the drivers and the field of these processes and associated practices (see Suddaby & Viale, 2011). This is markedly different from our case setting, where occupation-based training is the outcome of strategic coordination amongst various collective actors (see Clarke et al., 2013), frequently involving micro-political processes and negotiations in institutional work (Helfen & Sydow, 2013). Building on this critical observation, it seems promising to compare and contrast institutional work projects related to occupational training programs in a variety of institutional settings, including LMEs such as the U.S. or the UK (Hall & Soskice, 2001). More broadly, we see promise in comparative work to further our understanding of why particular work projects are successful and others not. Here, we assume that institutional work projects aiming to establish novel and perhaps deviating practices may be less dependent on the consistency or fit with the existing logic.

Furthermore, we encourage future research looking at the process of institutional work along the three pillars of an institutional environment—cognitive, regulative, and normative. These future studies could not only help clarify the interplay between the three practice clusters described in this paper, but also explore the boundary conditions of the arguments developed here. For example, our data suggest that normative work is particularly difficult in settings characterized by high disintegration of previously integrated organizations and the creation of network forms of organization (Helfen et al., 2017). As a corollary to this argument, we would expect normative work to be less challenging in other settings. For example, professions and occupations offering higher status and pay at the outset may struggle less with the task of creating and sustaining normative underpinnings and appropriate rules and supportive regulations, not least those related to pay and career progression. Because institutional work projects have direct implications for professional or occupational groups and whether they are

recognized as such, the field of occupations and professions constitutes a promising research context to advance our understanding of associated activities and processes (Hodgson et al., 2015; Muzio et al., 2013). Here, future research could use ethnography to study micro-level practices of institutional work (see Wright, Zammuto, & Liesch, 2017), which may potentially depart from or be misaligned with more macro-level activities and strategies (McCann et al., 2013). Comparative work involving different institutional fields, professions and occupations, and contrasting successful and failed processes, could make a meaningful contribution to our collective knowledge of the forms, processes, and outcomes of institutional work projects.

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